

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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INR-07 NSAE-00 INRE-00 CPR-01 PRS-01 USIE-00
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TAGS: CGEN PDIP SHUM SPON
SUBJ: FIRST USINT CONSULAR CLIENTS MEET U.S. PRESS

REF: HOLLADAY-SMITH TELCON

1.SUMMARY. FORTY TO SIXTY CUBAN AND DUAL NATIONAL
AMCIT CONSULAR CLIENTS WHO APPEARED AT USINT MORNING OF
SEPTEMBER 2 WERE INTERVIEWED AND FILMED BY US TELEVISION
AND PRINT REPORTERS INSIDE THE BUILDING. MANY SPOKE
FRANKLY ABOUT THEIR DESIRE TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY AND
THEIR DISMAL SITUATION HERE AND INDICATED THAT THOUSANDS
SHARE THEIR VIEWS. THEIR BRASH AND UNRESTRAINED TALK,
IF CARRIED BY US MEDIA, COULD GET THEM INTO TROUBLE WITH
CUBAN AUTHORITIES IN TERMS OF THEIR OWN CASES,AND INCIDENT
COULD AFFECT RELATIONS BWETWEEN USINT AND GOC. END SUMMARY

2. WHILE ENTIRE US STAFF WAS IN MORNING MEETING, VISITING
PRESS CORPS, INCLUDING TV NETWORKS, MIAMI HERALD, AND
NEWSWEEK GATHERED IN RECEPTION AREA OF BUILDING FOR
FOLLOW-UP REPORTING ON SEPTEMBER 1 OPENING. AS CUBAN
AND AMCIT CONSULAR CLIENTS BEGAN TO ARRIVE, SEEKING ADVICE
ON VISAS, VALIDITY OF OLD DOCUMENTS FROM AIRLIFT ERA AND
EXPLANATION OF ONGOING AMCIT REPATRIATION, THEY WERE CON-
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FRONTED BY WAITING PRESS. BY TIME CONSULAR OFFICERS BECAME
AWARE OF THE EVENTS ON THE FIRST FLOOR, ON CAMERA INTERVIEWS WITH
CLIENTS WERE ALREADY UNDERWAY.

3. CONOFF IMMEDIATELY ASKED SECURITY GUARDS TO ASSIST HIM
IN FUNNELING CLIENTS, MINUS US PRESS, INTO A GROUND FLOOR
INTERVIEWING/WAITING ROOM WHERE THEY COULD BE SEADED AND

THEN ANNOUNCED IN SPANISH THAT THE GROUP SHOULD FOLLOW HIM INTO THE ROOM. ONCE THEY WERE SEATED, CONOFF APOLOGIZED THAT USINT WAS PHYSICALLY UNABLE TO INTERVIEW ALL OF THE CLIENTS THAT DAY. THE MEETING EVOLVED QUICKLY INTO A QUESTION ANSWER SESSION. TV AND PRINT MEDIA HAD GATHERED MEANTIME OUTSIDE THE ROOM. WHEN ONE CREW TURNED ON LIGHTS AN BEGAN FILMING, CONOFF STOPPED SESSION TO ASK THAT THEY RESPECT CONFIDENTIALITY OF CONSULAR MEETING AND PRIVACY OF INDIVIDUALS. CREWS STOPPED FILMING BUT PRINT PEOPLE KEPT ON TAKING NOTES.

4. THE CLIENTS GENERALLY WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT DEPARTURE POSSIBILITIES. SOME CLUNG TO DOG-EARED DOCUMENTS RELATING TO REFUGEE AIRLIFT. OTHERS WERE DUAL NATIONAL AMCITS REGISTERED FOR REPATRIATION, SOME WANTED VISAS, EVEN THOUGH THEY HAD NO PASSPORTS AND NO AUTHORIZATION TO LEAVE CUBA. MOST HAD RELATIVES AND FRIENDS IN THE US.

5. CONOFF EXPLAINED THAT THERE WOULD BE NO PRACTICAL USE IN TAKING VISA APPLICATIONS FROM PERSONS WHO HAD NO PROSPECT OF LEAVING CUBA. ON REPATRIATION, CONFF EXPLAINED THAT CUBAN AUTHORITIES CONSIDERED THE DUAL NATIONAL REGISTRANTS TO BE CUBAN, AND THUS SUBJECT TO CUBAN DEPARTURE CONTROLS, BUT THAT THE US FULLY RECOGNIZED THEIR US CITIZENSHIPS AND WOULD PURSUE THEIR REPATRIATION IN EVERY PRACTICAL WAY. HE EXPLAINED THAT DIRECT COMMUNICATION LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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BETWEEN US AND CUBAN GOVERNMENTS HAD JUST BEGUN AND THAT IT WAS UNREASONABLE TO EXPECT IMMEDIATE DEVELOPMENTS IN THEIR CASES.

6. ONE PERSON ASKED WHY PRESIDENT CARTER HAD NOT INCLUDED CUBA IN HIS HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN. CONOFF REPLIED THAT PRESIDENT'S CONCERN FOR HUMAN RIGHTS EXTENDS TO ALL COUNTRIES, INCLUDING OUR OWN, BUT THAT THE OBJECT OF THIS POLICY IS TO HAVE SOME PRACTICAL EFFECT ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND THAT IT SHOULD BE SEEN IN THIS CONTEXT.

7. THE SESSION ENDED AMICABLY. PEOPLE APPEARED GLAD TO HAVE GOTTEN TO SEE AND TALK TO A REAL AMERICAN OFFICIAL AFTER SO MANY YEARS AND PROMISED THEY WOULD BE BACK WHEN THINGS QUIETED DOWN.

8. COMMENT: IT IS OUR CLEAR IMPRESSION THAT THE CONSULAR CLIENTS INTERVIEWED BY THE PRESS UNDERSTOOD THAT THEY WERE SPEAKING ON THE RECORD FOR PUBLICATION. BY DOING SO THEY MAY HAVE HARMED THEIR OWN CASES. SINCE THE INTERVIEWS TOOKPLACE IN OUR BUILDING, CUBAN GOVERNMENT MIGHT CHOOSE TO BLAME US FOR THIS AIRING OF GRIEVANCES. NEVERTHELESS,

ON THE POSITIVE SIDE, THE GROUP SESSION GAVE THE LIENTS
AN OPPORTUNITY TO AIR THEIR CASES AND WE WERE ABLE TO GIVE
THEM A REALISTIC VIEW OF WHAT WE CAN AND CANNOT DO FOR THEM
AT THIS EARLY STAGE OF OUR OPERATIONS. WE WILL OF COURSE
NOW INSTITUTE MORE NORMAL PROCEDURES FOR VISITORS AND PRESS
ENTERING THE BUILDING WHICH PRECLUDE FUTURE INSTANCES OF
PRESS COVERAGE OF OFFICIAL BUSINESS ON THE PREMISES.
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